

ST. MARY'S COUNTY - Congressman Steny Hoyer today joined the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the State of Maryland to begin seeding 10 million oysters in a newly established oyster sanctuary. This restoration effort is one of several projects that address natural resource injuries from the April 2000 oil spill into the Patuxent River in southern Maryland. Following are Congressman Hoyer's remarks as prepared for delivery.

"Many of you recall, as I do, the shock and sadness our community felt in the days and weeks following the Chalk Point oil spill of 2000.

"Approximately 140,000 gallons of oil were released into the river and we suffered tremendous damage to our environment, wildlife, and our ability to enjoy the beauty of the Patuxent River.

"Many people's property, my own included, were soiled by the oil, and many area watermen, who depend on the river for their livelihood, suffered significant financial losses.

"NOAA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Maryland Department of Natural Resources worked cooperatively with Pepco to determine the nature and extent of injuries to our natural resources and the restoration needed to reverse the losses.

"After a thorough review and analysis, it was determined the oil affected an estimated 80 acres of wetlands, killing more than 1000 birds and animals, including diamondback terrapins, fish and shellfish. Significant losses were also experienced in terms of the recreational use of the river.

"In December 2002, we gathered at Greenwell Park for the announcement of a final restoration plan. Now, less than two years later, we are reconvening to put the finishing touches on the first project to be completed - an oyster sanctuary.

"Oysters improve water quality by filtering bay water. The Chesapeake Bay, whose name means "great shellfish bay" was historically marked by high abundances of oysters that were able to filter the bay water in a period of three days. It takes the current population one year.

“Disease, over harvesting, and low dissolved oxygen levels are primarily responsible for the population decline. In response to this decline, Maryland and federal government stakeholders initiated and completed an action plan to restore the ecological and economic benefits of oysters in the bay. The plan designated six tributaries (Chester, Choptank, Magothy, Nanitoke, Patuxent, and Severn) as oyster recovery areas. The goal is to increase the population 10- fold by the year 2010.

“Since 2000, the Oyster Recovery Partnership has planted over 334 million spat (juvenile oysters) at 33 locations in the bay. We planted some of those here on Trent Hall Farm in 2002. Bud Virts donated 10 acres of property to establish a sanctuary named for his father, the late State Senator Paul J. Bailey. The Army Corps of Engineers helped prepare the sites and approximately 100 people planted 3-5 million spat.

“Today, we will begin seeding 10 million oysters in a newly established Oyster Sanctuary. This sanctuary will protect critical habitat that benefits the natural resources of the Patuxent River.

“I am proud to have played a role in securing over \$23 million in federal funding for the oyster restoration project. I believe in the strength and quality of this partnership and will continue to play an active role.”

Congressman Hoyer has been a continuing partner with NOAA, USFWS and the state to ensure the prompt clean up of the Patuxent River. Additionally, Congressman Hoyer has helped secure more than \$15 million in federal funds for the Oyster Recovery Project and over \$23 million total to replenish the oyster population of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

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